

## Message Text

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ACTION NEA-07

INFO OCT-01 SS-14 ISO-00 SP-02 INR-05 NSC-05 NSCE-00

CIAE-00 DODE-00 MCT-01 /035 W  
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R 151121Z NOV 76

FM AMEMBASSY BEIRUT

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 2299

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 BEIRUT 8447

LIMDIS

FROM CHARGE

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, LE, US

SUBJECT: OBSERVATIONS FROM CHRISTIAN LEBANON

REF: STATE 268703

1. SUMMARY. THE FOLLOWING REPORT, BASED ON CHARGE'S NOV 5-9 VISIT TO CHRISTIAN-CONTROLLED LEBANON, COMMENTS ON THE PERSONALITIES OF SOME OF THE PRINCIPAL CHRISTIAN LEADERS AND SUMMARIZES THEIR VIEWS CONCERNING SYRIA'S INTENTIONS, THE PALESTINIAN PRESENCE, FUTURE POLITICAL ORGANIZATION, AND THEIR REACTIONS TO THE VISIT ITSELF. END SUMMARY.

2. THE BARONS OF EAST BEIRUT AND OTHER PERSONALITIES. ALTHOUGH LEBANON'S ECONOMY HAS BECOME THE EPITOME OF THE MODERN FREE ENTERPRISE SYSTEM, PLITICALLY THE COUNTRY REMAINS MEDIEVAL. THE PRINCIPAL CHRISTIAN LEADERS, CHAMOUN, GEMAYEL, FRANGIE AND KASSIS, RESEMBLE FEUDAL BARONS COMPETING AMONG THEMSELVES FOR POWER AND INFLUENCE, AND UNITING ONLY TO ASSURE THAT THE "KING" (SARKIS) OR ANY OUTSIDE FORCE DOES NOT ACQUIRE TOO MUCH POWER OVER THEM. THEY ARE FASCINATING AND CONTRASTING PERSONALITIES. CAMILLE CHAMOUN AT 76 MAY HAVE HIS WEAK MOMENTS, BUT HE IS  
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TOUGH, SHREWD AND VERY EXPERIENCED IN THE JUNGLE OF

LEBANESE POLITICS, A MAN WHO CAN BE RUTHLESS IF THE SITUATION REQUIRES AND A VERY DANGEROUS OPPONENT. HIS NICKNAME, "THE SILVER FOX," IS VERY APT. PIERRE GEMAYEL IS EMOTIONAL AND DYNAMIC. AS HAS BEEN REPORTED -- KINDLY -- "HIS MIND IS NOT SUBTLE OR ATTUNED TO NUANCES OF LANGUAGE," BUT HE IS NEVERTHELESS A NATURAL LEADER AND HIS KATAEB PARTY IS THE MOST EFFECTIVE POLITICAL-MILITARY ORGANIZATION IN LEBANON. FRANGIE IS UNEDUCATED AND SELF-IMPORTANT, BUT, AS A FORMER PRESIDENT AND A LEADER IN THE KEY CHRISTIAN STRONGHOLD OF ZGHORTA, HE HAS CONSIDERABLE PRESTIGE. HIS PERSONAL RELATIONSHIP WITH SYRIAN PRESIDENT ASAD, DATING BACK TO THE DAYS WHEN FRANGIE TOOK REFUGE IN THE ALAWITE MOUNTAINS OF SYRIA AFTER HAVING MURDERED SEVERAL PEOPLE IN LEBANON, IS AN IMPORTANT ASSET TO THE CHRISTIANS. CHARBEL KASSIS STANDS OUT AMONG THE MARONITE CLERICS NOT ONLY BECAUSE HE WEARS TWO PISTOLS UNDER HIS CASSOCK, BUT BECAUSE HE IS AN EXTREMELY INTELLIGENT AND FORCEFUL PERSONALITY, IN CLOSE TOUCH WITH THE GRASS ROOTS OF THE MARONITE COMMUNITY. EACH REPRESENTS A DIFFERENT GEOGRAPHIC REGION; IF UNITED FOR A SINGLE PURPOSE, THEY ARE A FORMIDABLE COMBINATION.

3. THE OTHER CHRISTIAN LEADERS PLAY A LESS IMPORTANT ROLE. THE MARONITE PATRIARCH, KHURAYSH, HAS BEEN IN OFFICE FOR ONLY ABOUT A YEAR. HE IS LIVELY AND WELL-INFORMED, BUT COMPLAINED THAT HE WAS "CUT OFF" IN HIS RESIDENCE IN BKERKE AND WAS ONLY CONSULTED WHEN THERE WAS A PROBLEM. HE HAS NOT YET ESTABLISHED THE PRESTIGE ENJOYED BY HIS PREDECESSOR, PAUL MEOUCHI. DORY CHAMOUN IS WELL-INFORMED AND A CLEVER TALKER, BUT NOT A HEAVYWEIGHT, USEFUL PRIMARILY AS A LEG MAN FOR HIS FATHER IN FOREIGN AFFAIRS. BECHIR GEMAYEL EXUDES SINCERITY AND MAY BE AN INSPIRATION TO THE PHALANGE MILITIA, BUT HE IS NOT YET A POLITICAL LEADER IN HIS OWN RIGHT.

4. TWO OF THE MOST IMPRESSIVE CHRISTIAN PERSONALITIES ARE NON-MARONITE -- GREEK CATHOLIC PATRIARCH MAXIMUS V AND FUAD BOUTROS, THE GREEK ORTHODOX FORMER FOREIGN

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MINISTER. MAXIMUS WAS BORN IN EGYPT, SERVED FOR YEARS IN ISRAEL, AND IS A PERSONAL FRIEND OF YASIR ARAFAT. HE IS A MAN OF BROAD UNDERSTANDING AND WIDE KNOWLEDGE OF THE POLITICAL PROBLEMS AND FIGURES IN LEBANON, BUT HIS INFLUENCE IS NOT GREAT.

5. THE GREEK ORTHODOX PLAY A UNIQUE ROLE IN LEBANON'S POLITICAL AND INTELLECTUAL LIFE. THE COUNTRY'S LEADING

NEWSPAPER IS OWNED BY THE GREEK ORTHODOX MINISTER OF LABOR AND SOCIAL AFFAIRS GHASSAN TUENI AND AUB IS SOMETIMES REFERRED TO AS A GREEK ORTHODOX UNIVERSITY BECAUSE SO MANY OF ITS PROFESSORS COME FROM THIS GROUP. AS THE SECOND LARGEST CHRISTIAN COMMUNITY, THEY ARE IMPORTANT ALLIES FOR THE MARONITES. TRADITIONALLY, LEBANON'S FOREIGN MINISTER IS GREEK ORTHODOX AND THE MEMBERS OF THIS RELIGIOUS COMMUNITY VIEW THE POLITICAL SCENE WITH MORE REALISM AND FEWER PREJUDICES THAN THE MARONITES. THE ANALYSIS OF THE CURRENT POLITICAL SITUATION IN LEBANON MADE BY FORMER FOREIGN MINISTER FUAD BOUTROS, WHO WAS PRESENT DURING CALL ON ARCHBISHOP SALIBI, COULD HAVE BEEN TAKEN DIRECTLY FROM THE TALKING POINTS (REFTEL).

6. CHRISTIAN ATTITUDE TOWARDS SYRIANS. THERE HAVE BEEN REPORTS THAT THE CHRISTIAN LEADERS, BUOYED BY THE IMPROVEMENT OF THEIR POLITICAL AND MILITARY POSITION DURING THE PAST SIX MONTHS, ARE COCKY AND CONFIDENT. THIS DOES NOT APPEAR TO BE THE CASE; THE CHRISTIANS ARE WELL AWARE THAT THEY ARE A SMALL ISLAND IN A MUSLIM SEA AND THEY DO NOT TRUST ANY OF THEIR NEIGHBORS, INCLUDING SYRIA AND EVEN ISRAEL. CAMILLE CHAMOUN AND FRANGIE APPARENTLY BELIEVE THEY CAN COUNT ON SYRIA'S SUPPORT AS LONG AS ASAD IS IN POWER; OTHER CHRISTIAN LEADERS ARE NOT SO SURE. CHARBEL KASSIS, DORY CHAMOUN AND BECHIR GEMAYEL ALL EXPRESSED SUSPICION AND DISTRUST OF SYRIA'S PRESENT INTENTIONS. BOTH KASSIS AND BECHIR WONDERED OUT LOUD IF THE SYRIANS WOULD REALLY LEAVE WHEN PRESIDENT SARKIS ASKED THEM TO (IF HE WERE PERMITTED TO MAKE SUCH A REQUEST), AND BECHIR WAS WORRIED THAT ONCE THE SYRIANS, UNDER THE GUISE OF THE ASF, HAD OCCUPIED KATAEB STRONG POINTS IN BEIRUT AND ELSEWHERE, THEY

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WOULD EITHER HOLD THEM INDEFINITELY OR ALLOW THEM TO BE OCCUPIED BY LEFTIST/PALESTINIANS. MOST CHRISTIAN LEADERS ARE CONVINCED THAT SYRIA IS PLAYING ITS OWN GAME AND IS NOT A RELIABLE ALLY. EVEN ISRAEL, DORY CHAMOUN SAID, WILL NOT SACRIFICE AN ACCEPTABLE MIDDLE EAST PEACE SETTLEMENT JUST TO SUPPORT CHRISTIAN LEBANON. AS A RESULT, MOST CHRISTIAN LEADERS PROBABLY REALIZE THAT NOW IS THE BEST TIME FOR THEM TO MAKE PEACE. THE HARD-LINERS -- CHAMOUN, FRANGIE AND GEMAYEL -- DID NOT SAY SO DIRECTLY, BUT THEIR COMMENTS SUGGEST THAT THEY KNOW THE FIGHTING PHASE OF THE LEBANESE WAR IS OVER AND THE POLITICAL PHASE IS BEGINNING. MORE MODERATE FIGURES, SUCH AS MARONITE PATRIARCH KHURAYSH AND FORMER FONMIN FUAD BOUTROS, SPECIFICALLY SAID THEY HAD BEEN URGING THE FRONT LINE LEADERS FOR WEEKS TO BE PREPARED

FOR POLITICAL COMPROMISE BECAUSE THEY WOULD NEVER BE IN  
A STRONGER NEGOTIATING POSITION.

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INFO OCT-01 SS-14 ISO-00 SP-02 INR-05 NSC-05 NSCE-00

CIAE-00 DODE-00 MCT-01 /035 W

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R 151121Z NOV 76

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 BEIRUT 8447

LIMDIS -- FROM CHARGE

7. THE PALESTINIANS: THE BETE NOIR. FOR THE  
CHRISTIAN LEADERS, THE PALESTINIANS ARE THE ROOT CAUSE  
OF ALL THEIR TROUBLES. EVERY LEADER REPEATED THE SAME  
THEME WITH VARIATIONS: WE WELCOMED THE PALESTINIANS  
WITH OPEN ARMS AND THEY BETRAYED US; WE GAVE THEM A  
CHANCE TO LIVE IN PEACE AND FREEDOM AND THEY KILLED OUR  
SONS AND TRIED TO TAKE OVER OUR COUNTRY. NOW THEY MUST GO.

8. THE PALESTINIANS HAVE ALWAYS POSED A SPECIAL  
PROBLEM FOR LEBANON. BECAUSE LEBANON IS A MULTI-  
CONFESSIONAL SOCIETY, ITS LEADERS COULD NOT IMPOSE  
STRICT CONTROLS ON THE PALESTINIANS AS OTHER ARAB  
COUNTRIES HAVE DONE. A CHRISTIAN LEADER WHO TRIED TO  
DO SO WAS ACCUSED OF BEING A BIGOT AND ANTI-ARAB; A  
MUSLIM LEADER WHO TRIED TO RESTRICT THEM WAS CONSIDERED  
A TRAITOR. THUS IN THE PAST, CHRISTIAN POLITICIANS HAVE  
BEEN KNOWN TO WINK AT PALESTINIAN TRANSGRESSIONS AS A  
WAY OF GAINING MUSLIM POLITICAL SUPPORT. NOW THEY ARE  
FULLY AWARE OF THE POWER OF THE MONSTER THEY ALLOWED TO  
DEVELOP; AND ARE DETERMINED TO ELIMINATE IT.

9. THE CHRISTIAN LEADERSHIP FULLY REALIZES THE

DIFFICULTY OF REDUCING THE PALESTINIAN PRESENCE IN LEBANON TO ABOUT 120,000, THEIR MAXIMUM FIGURE. THEY KNOW THAT MOST OTHER ARAB COUNTRIES WILL NOT ACCEPT THEM, BUT THEY HAVE NO OTHER SOLUTIONS TO SUGGEST, CONFIDENTIAL

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EVEN THOUGH THEY SAY THERE CAN BE NO PERMANENT SOLUTION TO THE LEBANESE PROBLEM UNTIL THE PALESTINIANS LEAVE. IN THEIR VIEW, OTHER COUNTRIES, AND SPECIFICALLY THE UNITED STATES, MUST FIND A SOLUTION TO THE PALESTINIAN PROBLEM, IN THE CONTEXT OF AN OVERALL MIDDLE EAST SETTLEMENT. ONCE THE PALESTINIANS HAVE SOME OTHER PLACE TO CALL HOME, THEN THE LEBANESE MIGHT BE WILLING TO TAKE SOME BACK AS FOREIGN WORKERS, ON THE SAME BASIS AS THE SYRIANS WHO CAME HERE IN THE BOMMING SIXTIES.

10. THE POLITICAL FUTURE. IN DISCUSSING THE POLITICAL FUTURE OF LEBANON, THE CHRISTIAN LEADERS EXPRESSED STRONG DOUBTS ABOUT THE POSSIBILITY OF REBUILDING A TRULY UNIFIED STATE, EVEN WITHOUT THE PALESTINIANS. SOME, LIKE GEMAYEL AND THE KASLIK MONKS, TALKED ABOUT THE "IRREVOCABLE SHATTERING" OF THE FORMULA OF 1943 ON WHICH THE LEBANESE ORIGINALLY PUT TOGETHER A MULTI-CONFESSIONAL STATE. RIYADH AL-SOLH, THE ONE MUSLIM LEADER WHO REALLY UNDERSTOOD CHRISTIAN FEARS, IS GONE AND THERE IS NO ONE TO TAKE HIS PLACE. DORY CHAMOUN EXPRESSED GRAVE DOUBTS ABOUT THE COMMITMENT OF LEBANESE MUSLIMS TO LEBANESE AS OPPOSED TO ARAB NATIONALISM; THE LEBANESE MUSLIMS, HE SAID, HAVE ALWAYS SOUGHT SUPPORT FROM ANOTHER ARAB COUNTRY AND WILL CONTINUE TO DO SO. THE UNIVERSAL THEME WAS THE INSISTENCE BY ALL CHRISTIAN LEADERS THAT THEY MUST HAVE A STATE WHERE THEY CAN LIVE AS THEY WISH, WITHOUT FEAR OF DOMINATION BY A NON-CHRISTIAN MAJORITY.

11. SURPRISINGLY, EVEN THE CHRISTIAN RELIGIOUS LEADERS SUPPORTED A SECULAR STATE, WHICH, THEY SAID, THE MUSLIMS WOULD OPPOSE BECAUSE OF THE NATURE OF ISLAM. THE CHRISTIANS ARE DETERMINED THAT THEY WILL MAKE THE RULES CONCERNING EDUCATION, PERSONAL STATUS LAW, AND RELIGIOUS FREEDOM, AT LEAST IN THEIR PART OF THE COUNTRY. THEY ARE MUCH LESS INTERESTED IN ECONOMIC MATTERS, WHICH WERE RARELY MENTIONED. ALTHOUGH THEY TALK OF FEDERATION, CONFEDERATION AND CANTONIZATION, NONE OF THE PRINCIPAL CHRISTIAN LEADERS, EXCEPT PERHAPS CAMILLE CHAMOUN, APPEARS TO HAVE YET DEVELOPED ANY VERY CONFIDENTIAL

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SPECIFIC FORMULAS. BECHIR GEMAYEL INDICATED THAT SOMETHING LIKE THE FEDERAL SYSTEM IN THE UNITED STATES MIGHT MEET HIS CONCERNS. ONCE NEGOTIATIONS BEGIN, THE CHRISTIANS MAY FIND THAT MANY OF THEIR IDEAS ARE CLOSER TO THOSE OF THE YOUNG, PROGRESSIVE MUSLIMS THAN THEY REALIZE (SEE BEIRUT 8437, DESCRIBING THE IDEAS OF THE MURABITUN).

12. ALTHOUGH THE CHRISTIAN LEADERS ARE PREPARING FOR NEGOTIATIONS ABOUT A NEW POLITICAL FRAMEWORK FOR LEBANON, THEY HAVE NOT ABANDONED THE IDEA OF PARTITION AS A FALL-BACK POSITION. THE PORT OF JOUNIEH HAS BEEN BUILT AS A PERMANENT INSTALLATION, AND BOTH DORY CHAMOUN AND BECHIR GEMAYEL EXPRESSED GREAT PRIDE IN THE NEW 1,600-METER AIRSTRIP NEAR CHEKKA WHICH THEY SAY CAN BE EXPANDED AND TRANSFORMED INTO AN INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT. OTHERS MAY NOT THINK THAT A CHRISTIAN LEBANESE STATE IS VIABLE, BUT THE CHRISTIAN LEADERS SEEM DETERMINED TO TRY IT IF THEY CANNOT ACHIEVE IN A UNIFIED STATE THE KIND OF SELF-GOVERNMENT THEY INSIST ON.

13. REACTION TO CHARGE'S VISIT. ALL OF THE CHRISTIAN LEADERS WERE OBVIOUSLY VERY PLEASED THAT AN EMBASSY OFFICER HAD FINALLY CROSSED FROM WEST TO EAST BEIRUT TO VISIT THEM. EVEN THOUGH THE TRIP WAS ARRANGED AT THE LAST MINUTE, MAKING IT IMPOSSIBLE TO ARRANGE APPOINTMENTS IN ADVANCE, AND INCLUDED A WEEKEND, CALLS WERE EASILY SCHEDULED. ACCORDING TO ONE REPORT, CHAMOUN, GEMAYEL AND FRANGIE POSTPONED A MEETING SO THAT PIERRE GEMAYEL COULD MEET WITH ME, AND BOTH BECHIR GEMAYEL AND DORY CHAMOUN MADE SPECIAL TRIPS TO THE MOUNTAIN TOWN OF RAYFOUN WHERE I WAS STAYING IN ORDER TO MAKE SURE I HEARD THEIR POINTS OF VIEW. FUAD BOUTROS COMMENTED, "IT IS GOOD THAT YOU HAVE COME TO TALK TO THE MARONITE LEADERS; NOW PERHAPS THEY WILL HAVE THE CONFIDENCE TO MAKE THE COMPROMISES NECESSARY FOR A DURABLE POLITICAL SOLUTION."

14. DEPT PLEASE REPEAT TO OTHER POSTS AS DESIRED.  
LANE

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## Message Attributes

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**Copy:** SINGLE  
**Draft Date:** 15 NOV 1976  
**Decaption Date:** 28 MAY 2004  
**Decaption Note:** 25 YEAR REVIEW  
**Disposition Action:** RELEASED  
**Disposition Approved on Date:**  
**Disposition Authority:** greeneet  
**Disposition Case Number:** n/a  
**Disposition Comment:** 25 YEAR REVIEW  
**Disposition Date:** 28 MAY 2004  
**Disposition Event:**  
**Disposition History:** n/a  
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**Disposition Remarks:**  
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**Document Unique ID:** 00  
**Drafter:** n/a  
**Enclosure:** n/a  
**Executive Order:** GS  
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**Original Previous Classification:** n/a  
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**Page Count:** 6  
**Previous Channel Indicators:** n/a  
**Previous Classification:** CONFIDENTIAL  
**Previous Handling Restrictions:** LIMDIS  
**Reference:** 76 STATE 268703  
**Review Action:** RELEASED, APPROVED  
**Review Authority:** greeneet  
**Review Comment:** n/a  
**Review Content Flags:**  
**Review Date:** 16 JUN 2004  
**Review Event:**  
**Review Exemptions:** n/a  
**Review History:** RELEASED <16 JUN 2004 by BoyleJA>; APPROVED <18 OCT 2004 by greeneet>  
**Review Markings:**

Margaret P. Grafeld  
Declassified/Released  
US Department of State  
EO Systematic Review  
04 MAY 2006

**Review Media Identifier:**  
**Review Referrals:** n/a  
**Review Release Date:** n/a  
**Review Release Event:** n/a  
**Review Transfer Date:**  
**Review Withdrawn Fields:** n/a  
**Secure:** OPEN  
**Status:** NATIVE  
**Subject:** OBSERVATIONS FROM CHRISTIAN LEBANON  
**TAGS:** PFOR, LE, US  
**To:** STATE  
**Type:** TE  
**Markings:** Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 04 MAY 2006